Beneath the Same Sky

An Invitation to Understanding Islam

by A Muslim Sister

Preface

There is a question I have carried since I was a teenager.

Not a question anyone asked me. One I asked myself, quietly, in the years I was learning English — the language that would shape my entire life as a teacher, and now, much later, as a writer.

The question was this: *If I am ever asked, one day, why I did not share what I know — what will I say?*

I am a Muslim. I have lived inside this faith for as long as I can remember. I have known its warmth, its logic, its mercy, its demands, and its extraordinary gentleness toward the human heart. And I speak English — the first international language, the bridge between more people on this earth than any other tongue.

For decades, I felt a sense of falling short of a duty I knew was mine — not guilt for something done wrong, but the quiet ache of something left undone. The feeling of knowing you carry something valuable, and that oth-

ers have the right to receive it, and that the moment has not yet come.

Every time I saw Islam misrepresented — called a religion of violence, associated with cruelty it does not preach — I felt that ache deepen. Not anger. Sadness. Because I knew. And I had the words. And still I waited.

I told myself: *I do not have the religious vocabulary.* Then the internet arrived, and that excuse dissolved.

I told myself: *I will find the right moment.* Then I became a grandmother, and I understood that the right moment had always been now.

This small book is my answer to forty years of waiting. It is not a theological treatise. It is not a debate. It is not written to convert anyone or to argue with anyone. It is written because every human being on this planet — wherever they were born, whatever they were told, whatever they believe — has the right to know.

Simply to know.

I am not a scholar. I am a retired teacher, a grandmother, a woman of faith who spent thirty years in classrooms and now spends her days writing. I offer these

pages the way I would offer a cup of tea to a curious stranger — warmly, without pressure, with nothing to prove.

We live beneath the same sky, you and I.

And this book is my invitation to you.

— *A Muslim Sister*

Chapter One — What Does Islam Mean?

Let us begin with a word.

Not a doctrine. Not a rule. Not a history. Just a word — because the word itself contains everything.

Islam.

Many people have heard it thousands of times without knowing what it actually means. It is not the name of a founder, the way Christianity carries the name of Christ. It is not the name of a people or a place. It is something far simpler, and far more beautiful.

Islam is an Arabic word. It comes from the root *s-l-m* — the same root that gives us *salaam*, the Arabic greeting of peace that Muslims exchange every day, all over the world.

Islam means, at its heart, peace. But more precisely, it means the peace that comes from surrender — from releasing the struggle against what is greater than yourself, and finding rest in that release.

A Muslim is simply one who has made that surrender. One who has chosen to live in conscious awareness of God, to align their life with His guidance, and to find in that alignment a deep and lasting peace.

This is not the image most people have been given.

The word Islam has appeared for decades alongside images of conflict, anger, and fear. And so for many, the word itself has come to carry those associations — not because they are true, but because repetition is powerful, and because few have ever sat quietly with someone who could say: *let me tell you what it actually means.*

So here we are. Sitting quietly together.

Islam means peace. It means surrender to God. It means the choice — made freshly, every single day — to live with intention, with mercy, and with awareness that this life is not the end of the story.

That is where it begins.

And already, perhaps, it is not what you expected.

Chapter Two — Who Is Allah?

Let us stay with words a little longer.

Because there is another word that has been misunderstood, perhaps more than any other in the modern world.

Allah.

For many non-Muslims, this word sounds foreign. Unfamiliar. Even unsettling — as though it refers to a different God entirely. A distant, severe deity belonging to another world.

But here is what is true, and what changes everything once you know it:

Allah is simply the Arabic word for God.

That is all. Not a different God. Not a new God. The same God that Abraham knew. The same God that Moses spoke to. The same God that Jesus prayed to. The Arabic-speaking Christians of the Middle East have always called Him Allah — long before Islam existed, and to this day.

If you were to open an Arabic Bible, you would find the word Allah on every page.

So when a Muslim says Allah, they are not invoking a stranger. They are calling on the same One that billions of human beings across history have turned toward in their moments of joy, grief, gratitude, and need.

Islam asks its followers to believe in one God — only one, without partners, without equals, without image or form. Not a God of one nation or one people, but the God of all creation. Of every sky. Of every soul.

This God, in the Islamic understanding, has ninety-nine names — each one describing a quality of His nature. Al-Rahman — the Most Merciful. Al-Raheem — the Most Compassionate. Al-Wadud — the Most Loving. Al-Hakeem — the Most Wise.

The very first words a Muslim reads in the Quran are these:

In the name of God, the Most Merciful, the Most Compassionate.

Not the Most Powerful. Not the Most Fearsome.

The Most Merciful. The Most Compassionate.

That is who Allah is.

And perhaps, reading this quietly wherever you are in the world, something in you recognises Him.

Chapter Three — Who Was Muhammad?

Let us stay with words a little longer — and with names.

Because there is a name that carries, perhaps, more weight than any other in this conversation. A name that some people speak with reverence, and others with suspicion, and many with nothing more than uncertainty.

Muhammad.

Peace be upon him.

For Muslims, that blessing — *peace be upon him* — follows his name automatically, the way a breath follows the one before it. Not from habit alone, but from love. A love that has endured fourteen centuries, across every language, every culture, every kind of human heart.

But who was he, really?

Not the image that has sometimes been drawn by those who did not know him. Not a warlord. Not a politician. Not a man who invented a religion to serve his own ambitions.

A man who, at the age of forty, in a cave on a mountain outside the city of Mecca, heard a single word he had never heard before in that way.

He could not read. He had never learned. And yet the first word revealed to him was:

Read.

He was alone. He was afraid. He ran home trembling and asked his wife to cover him. He said: *"I feared for myself."* And his wife — a woman of extraordinary calm and certainty — held him, and told him: *"Never. By God, He will never disgrace you. You maintain the ties of kinship. You speak the truth. You carry the burdens of the weak. You give to those who have nothing. You honour your guests. And you help others in times of genuine need."*

— Sahih al-Bukhari

She was his first believer. Before any army. Before any nation. Before the world knew his name.

He was born into a world that buried its daughters alive.

I say this plainly, because it is true, and because what he did about it matters. Into that world — a world of

tribal violence, of slavery, of the strong devouring the weak — he came with a message that was, for its time, almost incomprehensible in its mercy.

The Prophet, peace be upon him, said:

"The best of you are those who are best to their families." — Sahih al-Tirmidhi, graded sahih

"None of you truly believes until he loves for his brother what he loves for himself." — Sahih al-Bukhari and Muslim

He spoke these things not as a philosopher in a garden, but as a man surrounded by enemies, navigating betrayal and loss, burying children, leading a community through extraordinary difficulty. His words were not theory. They were lived.

There is something I want to say carefully here, because it matters.

Muslims do not worship Muhammad, peace be upon him. This is a misunderstanding that has persisted for centuries — the word *Mohammedanism* was used for so long by outsiders that many assumed Muslims revered

him the way Christians revere Christ. But Islam is clear on this point, and has always been clear.

He was a human being. Chosen, beloved, the final messenger — but human. He ate. He laughed. He wept. He asked for forgiveness. He grew old.

In matters of conveying the faith, Islamic belief holds that he was protected from error — what he transmitted from God was preserved, complete, and trustworthy. But in human affairs, in personal judgements outside of revelation, he was not beyond gentle correction. The Quran itself records moments where God guided him further — as in the story of the blind man in Surah Abasa, or the question of the prisoners of Badr. This is not a flaw in the portrait. It is part of its honesty. A man so close to God that God corrected him directly, and did not let any error in matters of religion stand.

When he died, his closest companion — the great Abu Bakr, may God be pleased with him — stood before the grieving community and said words that have echoed ever since:

"Whoever worshipped Muhammad, let him know that Muhammad has died. And whoever worshipped God, let him know that God does not die." — Sahih al-Bukhari

This is Islam's answer to the question of who Muhammad was. The greatest of human beings. The seal of the prophets. A mercy sent to all the worlds.

And nothing more than that — which is, in itself, everything.

Perhaps, reading this, something has shifted — even slightly. Not into belief. I am not asking for that.

But perhaps into curiosity. Into the sense that this man deserves to be known more honestly than the world has often allowed.

If that is where you are, that is enough. We can continue from there.

"We have not sent you except as a mercy to all the worlds." — Qur'an, 21:107

Chapter Four — Jesus in Islam

I want to tell you something that surprises almost everyone who hears it for the first time.

Muslims love Jesus.

Not as a historical figure at a polite distance. Not as a borrowed character from another tradition. But as a prophet — honoured, revered, and spoken of with the same blessing Muslims offer all the prophets: *peace be upon him.*

His name in Arabic is *Isa*. And he is mentioned by name **25 times** in the Quran, across 15 chapters — more times than Muhammad himself.

Let that settle for a moment.

The Quran speaks of Jesus, peace be upon him, with extraordinary tenderness. It confirms his miraculous birth — to a virgin mother, Maryam, whose name is also a chapter in the Quran, the only chapter named after a woman. It describes him speaking as an infant in his cradle, defending his mother's honour before those

who doubted her. It records his miracles — healing the sick, giving sight to the blind, raising the dead, and even telling people what they had eaten and what they had stored in their homes — all, the Quran says, by the permission of God:

"And I heal the blind and the leper, and I bring the dead to life, and I inform you of what you eat and what you store in your houses." — Qur'an, 3:49

The Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, himself said:

"Both in this world and in the Hereafter, I am the nearest of all the people to Jesus, the son of Mary. The prophets are brothers — their message is one, though their laws differ across time." — Sahih al-Bukhari, 3443

The prophets are brothers. Not strangers. Not rivals. Brothers.

The Quran calls him *Kalimatullah* — the Word of God:

"The Messiah, Jesus son of Mary, was a messenger of God and His Word, which He conveyed unto Mary, and a Spirit from Him." — Qur'an, 4:171

These are not small titles. Islam does not diminish Jesus. It honours him deeply, completely, and without hesitation.

Where Islam and Christianity part ways is not over Jesus himself, but over his nature.

Islam holds that Jesus, peace be upon him, was one of the greatest of God's messengers — but a messenger, a human being, not divine. Not the son of God in a literal sense. Not part of a trinity. The Quran is direct on this point:

"It is not befitting for God to take a son. Glory be to Him." — Qur'an, 19:35

This is the difference. And it is a real one — I do not want to paper over it.

But I want you to notice something. The disagreement is a theological one, between people who all love him. Muslims and Christians are not, at their root, fighting over whether Jesus matters. They are in a long, sometimes painful conversation about who he was.

That is a very different thing from hostility. That is, in its own way, a shared devotion.

Islam teaches that Jesus, peace be upon him, was not crucified — that God raised him up before that could happen:

"They did not kill him, nor did they crucify him, but it was made to appear so to them." — Qur'an, 4:157

And Islam teaches that he will return before the Day of Judgement — this belief is grounded in authentic hadith:

"By the One in Whose hand is my soul, the son of Mary will soon descend among you as a just judge." — Sahih al-Bukhari and Muslim

Muslims believe he will live on this earth, and that he will die as every human being dies, and that he will be buried.

I have always found this extraordinarily moving. That the faith so many assume is opposed to Jesus has kept a place for him — in its prophecy, in its love, in its understanding of how the story of this world will end.

Maryam — Mary — is the only woman mentioned by name in the Quran. In a book of 114 chapters, she

has one named after her entirely. She is described in the Quran as:

"O Mary, God has chosen you and purified you and chosen you above the women of all the worlds." — Qur'an, 3:42

A faith that is sometimes accused of diminishing women chose a woman — this woman — as its highest human example of purity, devotion, and trust in God.

I am not asking you to resolve any theology today.

I am only asking you to consider the possibility that the distance between these two great faiths — Christianity and Islam — may be smaller than the world has led you to believe.

We do not worship the same way. We do not hold identical beliefs about who Jesus was.

But we love him. And we share, in him, something that has never quite been broken.

"And We made the son of Mary and his mother a sign, and sheltered them on a high ground of rest and flowing springs." — Qur'an, 23:50

Chapter Five — What Islam Asks of People

Every faith asks something of those who follow it.

Islam asks five things. They are called the five pillars — and I have always found that word, pillars, exactly right. Not a cage. Not a list of restrictions. Pillars are what hold something open. What allow a space to stand, and breathe, and shelter those inside it.

Here is what they are.

The first is a declaration.

There is no god but God, and Muhammad, peace be upon him, is His messenger.

One sentence. Spoken with sincerity, it is all that is required to enter Islam. No ceremony, no institution, no intermediary. Just a human being, alone or in company, saying aloud what they have come to believe in their heart.

I find something deeply democratic in this. The door has no lock that requires another person's key.

The second is prayer.

Five times a day, Muslims turn toward Mecca and pray. At dawn, at midday, in the afternoon, at sunset, and at night.

Five pauses in the ordinary day. Five moments of returning to what matters. Five reminders that this life — with all its noise and urgency — is held inside something larger and quieter than itself.

The prayers are not long. A few minutes each. But their rhythm, across a lifetime, becomes something a person carries in the body as much as the mind. A kind of returning. A kind of coming home.

The third is giving.

Every year, Muslims who have enough give a portion of their wealth — two and a half percent — to those who do not. Not as charity in the voluntary sense. As an obligation. As a recognition that wealth is never entirely one's own, that society is held together by what flows between those who have and those who need.

It is called *zakat* — which comes from a root meaning both purification and growth. What you give, purifies what remains. And what remains, grows.

The fourth is fasting.

Once a year, during the month of Ramadan, Muslims fast from dawn to sunset. No food, no water, no intimacy — a full withdrawal from the appetites that ordinarily govern the day.

But Ramadan is not an experience of deprivation. Ask any Muslim and they will tell you: it is the most beloved month of the year. The nights are alive with prayer and family and generosity. The hunger sharpens something. The days feel different — cleaner, more intentional, more aware.

It is a month that reminds the body that the soul is in charge.

The fifth is a journey.

Once in a lifetime, if they are able, Muslims make the pilgrimage to Mecca — the *Hajj*. They come from every country on earth, wearing the same simple white cloth, standing together on the same plain, equal before

God. No rank. No wealth. No nation. Just human beings, together, at the place where it all began.

There is nothing quite like it on this earth. Millions of people, one direction, one purpose.

These five things — declaration, prayer, giving, fasting, pilgrimage — are not a burden. They are a shape. A rhythm that holds a life together, that returns a person, again and again, to what is real.

Not rules. A beautiful architecture for a human life.

"And whoever does an atom's weight of good will see it." — Qur'an, 99:7

Chapter Six — Islam Is for All of Humanity

There is one more thing I want you to know before we part.

Islam was not sent for Arabs. It was not sent for one race, one century, one geography.

The Quran says — clearly, repeatedly — that Muhammad, peace be upon him, was sent as a mercy to all the worlds. Not to a tribe. Not to a people. To all of creation.

This is, if you think about it, an extraordinary claim.

Every human being who has ever lived, in every corner of this earth, was within the scope of that mercy. The message was always meant to reach them — in their language, in their time, through someone who could carry it.

Islam teaches that God did not leave any people without guidance. Before Muhammad, peace be upon him, there were prophets — many of them. Adam.

Noah. Abraham. Moses. Jesus, peace be upon them all. And others whose names we do not know. All of them carried the same essential message: there is one God, live with intention, be merciful, return to Him.

The Quran confirms this:

"And for every nation there is a messenger." — Qur'an, 10:47

Muhammad, peace be upon him, was the last. The seal. Not because God grew tired of speaking, but because the message had at last been given in its complete and preserved form — a form that would endure.

And it has endured.

The Quran recited today is identical to the Quran recited fourteen centuries ago. Not approximately. Identically. It is, among the world's sacred texts, uniquely preserved — memorised in its entirety by millions of people in every generation, in the original Arabic, without a single letter changed.

This is not a small thing. This is, for Muslims, one of the signs.

I want to say something personal here.

I am Algerian. I grew up speaking Arabic. I came to English as a teacher, and I spent thirty years offering it as a bridge to my students — a way to reach the wider world.

This book is that same impulse, thirty years later.

Islam was never only mine. It was never only Arab, only North African, only this century or that one. It belongs, in its invitation, to every human being who has ever looked up at the sky and wondered.

We all live beneath it. Every one of us.

That is why this book has the title it does.

"O humanity — We have created you from a male and a female, and made you into peoples and tribes so that you may know one another." — Qur'an, 49:13

Closing — Until We Meet Again

We have come a long way together, you and I.

We began with a word — *Islam* — and found peace inside it. We met the God that billions have called on since the beginning of human memory. We sat with a man who could not read; yet he changed the world. We discovered Jesus, peace be upon him, in a place many did not expect to find him. We walked through the five pillars and found not a list of rules but a rhythm, a shape, a way of being human with intention.

And we arrived here — at the simple, ancient truth that this was never meant for one people alone.

I want to be honest with you about something.

I did not write this book to make you a Muslim.

I wrote it because I believe that every human being deserves accurate information about what one and a half billion people on this earth believe, practice, and love. I wrote it because misunderstanding has caused too much

pain, for too long, on all sides. I wrote it because I am a teacher, and a teacher cannot sit on what she knows.

Whatever you believe — whatever you carry with you when you close these pages — I hope you carry this too: that Islam is not what fear made it look like. That the people who practice it are your neighbours in the deepest sense. That we share more, beneath this sky, than we have been told.

If something in these pages stirred a question — follow it. Read. Ask. Sit with someone who knows and who will answer you with patience and without pressure. The truth does not need to be defended by closing doors. It only needs to be offered, warmly, to those who are ready to receive it.

And if you are not ready — that is all right too. The sky is still there. The invitation remains open.

It always will be.

With warm regards, and with prayer for every soul who reads these words —

A Muslim Sister

"God invites to the Home of Peace, and guides whom He wills to a straight path." — Qur'an, 10:25

Appendix — Jesus in the Quran: For Those Who Want to Know More

Jesus, peace be upon him, is mentioned by name 25 times in the Quran, across 15 chapters. He is also referenced indirectly — as Son of Mary, as the Messiah, as the Word of God — dozens more times. What follows is a selection of the most significant verses, organised by theme.

His Birth and Nature

"The angels said, 'O Mary, God gives you good news of a Word from Him, whose name will be the Messiah, Jesus, son of Mary, held in honour in this world and the next, and one of those brought near to God.'" — Qur'an, 3:45

"She said, 'My Lord, how can I have a child when no man has touched me?' He said, 'This is how God creates what He wills: when He has ordained something, He only says "Be" and it is.'" — Qur'an, 3:47

"And We made her and her son a sign for all peoples." — Qur'an, 21:91

His Miracles

"I will create the shape of a bird out of clay for you, then breathe into it and, with God's permission, it will be a real bird. I will heal the blind and the leper, and bring the dead back to life with God's permission. I will tell you what you eat and what you store in your homes." — Qur'an, 3:49

"We gave Jesus, the son of Mary, clear signs and strengthened him with the Holy Spirit." — Qur'an, 2:87

His Words as an Infant

"He said: 'I am indeed a servant of God. He has given me the Book and made me a prophet. He has made me blessed wherever I am, and commanded me to pray and give alms as long as I live, and to be dutiful to my mother. He has not made me arrogant or wicked. Peace was on me the day I was born, and will be on me the day I die and the day I am raised to life again.'" — Qur'an, 19:30-33

His Message

"Jesus, son of Mary, said: 'Children of Israel, I am sent to you by God, confirming the Torah that came before me and bringing good news of a messenger to follow me whose name will be Ahmad.'" — Qur'an, 61:6

"When Jesus came with clear signs, he said: 'I have come to you with wisdom and to clarify some of what you dispute. So be mindful of God and obey me.'" — Qur'an, 43:63

He Was Not Crucified — He Was Raised Up

"They did not kill him, nor did they crucify him, though it was made to appear like that to them. Those that disagreed about him are full of doubt, with no knowledge to follow, only supposition: they certainly did not kill him — God raised him up to Himself." — Qur'an, 4:157-158

"God said: 'Jesus, I will take you back and raise you up to Me. I will purify you of those who disbelieve and place those who follow you above those who disbelieve until the Day of Resurrection.'" — Qur'an, 3:55

He Is Not God, Nor Part of a Trinity

The Quran addresses this directly and clearly — not with hostility, but with honesty:

"People of the Book, do not go to extremes in your religion, and do not say anything about God except the truth: the Messiah, Jesus son of Mary, was nothing more than a messenger of God, His word, directed to Mary, a spirit from Him. So believe in God and His messengers and do not say 'Trinity' — stop, that is better for you — God is only one God. He is far above having a son." — Qur'an, 4:171

"Those who say God is the third of three are defying the truth: there is only one God." — Qur'an, 5:73

"The Messiah, son of Mary, was only a messenger; messengers had come and gone before him; his mother was a truthful woman; both of them ate food. See how clear We make these signs for them; see how deluded they are." — Qur'an, 5:75

"Jesus himself will say on the Day of Judgement: 'I never said to them anything except what You commanded me to say: Worship God, my Lord and your Lord.'" — Qur'an, 5:117

His Return

"By the One in Whose hand is my soul, the son of Mary will soon descend among you as a just judge." — Sahih al-Bukhari and Muslim

These verses are an invitation to read further. The complete Quran is available free online at **quran.com** in dozens of languages and translations.